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Message Text

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70
ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 INT-08 IO-14 DRC-01 /115 W
---------- 026265
R 191245Z JAN 74
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0937
INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA
AMCONSUL CAN THO
AMCONSUL NHA TRANG
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL JEC PARIS
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
USAAG NKP THAILAND
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

UNCLAS SAIGON 0859

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, VS, CH
SUBJECT: SAIGON MEDIA REACTION TO PARACELS ISSUE

1. THE ANNOUNCED MILITARY CLASH AT THE PARACEL ISLANDS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE RVN (SEPTEL) HAS NOT YET HIT THE SAIGON PRESS, BUT THE ISSUE HAS BEEN A MAJOR FRONT-PAGE ITEM FOR SEVERAL DAYS RUNNING. THE REPORTED MOVEMENTS OF CHINESE SHIPS AND PZDSONNEL HAMV BEEN FOLLOWED CLOSELY, AND THE STATMENTS OF RVN SPOKESMEN ARE HEAVILY RELIED UPON AS AUTHORITATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EVENTS. THE UNIVERSAL VIEWPOINT, EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, IS THAT THE ISLANDS BELONG TO THE RVN, AND THAT VIGILANCE MUST BE MAINTAINED AGAINST THIS CHINESE ENCROACHMENT.

2. THE PAPERS DATED JAN 18 SAID THAT THE RVN NAVY WAS ON THE
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SCENE TO LEND SUPPORT TO THE VIETNAMESE GARRISON STATIONED THERE AND PROTECT SOUTH VIETNAM'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. THE INDEPENDENT

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CATHOLIC-ORIENTED DAILY HOA BINH CITED A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN AS NOTING POINTEDLY THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE LEADERS HAVE KEPT SILENT ABOUT THE ISSUE, WHILE PROCLAIMING THEY WERE STRUGGLING FOR INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY. THIS SHOWS THEY ARE ACCOMPLICES OF COMMUNIST CHINA, THE SPOKESMAN REPORTEDLY DECLARED. INDEPENDENT CHINH LUAN SAID THAT AMBASSADOR MARTIN MET JAN 17 WITH THE RVN FOREIGN MINISTER, PRESUMABLY ABOUT THE PARACELS AMONV OTHER MATTERS. THE SAME PAPER REPORTED A U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT STATE-MENT THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT INTERFERE IN THE ISSUE.

3. THE PRESS OF JAN 19 CARRIED CONFLICTING HEADLINES WHICH STATED, IN SOME PAPERS, THAT THE CHINESE WERE BACKING OFF AND, IN OTHERS, THAT THE TWO SIDES WERE POSSIBLY ON THE VERGE OF FIGHTING. SOME OF THE STORIES UNDER THE HEADLINES WERE NOTABLY THIN ON HARD FACTS. GVN MILITARY SPOKESMAN LT. COL. LE TRUONG HIEN WAS QUOTED IN TIEN TUYEN, THE ARMED FORCES PAPER, AS SAYING THAT NO CLASHES HAD OCCURRED YET. HIEN ALSO REPORTEDLY OBSERVED THAT, ALTHOUGH THE ARMED FORCES MUST DEFEND THE COUNTRY, FIGHTING IS A SERIOUS DECISION WHICH MUST BE CONSIDERED CAREFULLY.

4. INDEPENDENT DAN LUAN RAN A STORY JAN 19 QUOTING VARIOUS POLITICIAFV IN SAIGON ON THE PARACELS ISSUE. ONE DEPUTY LINKED THE CHINESE ACTION TO THE RECENT CHINESE-VC AGREEMENT ON VISA EXEMPTIONS, CONCLUDING THAT CHINA MAY HAVE RENEWED ITS ACTIVE SPONSORSHIP OF THE VC BY A SECRET AGREEMENT. THE SAME DEPUTY ALSO SPECULATED THAT SECRET AGREEMENT AMONG THE GREAT POWERS MIGHT LIE BEHIND THE PARA-
CELS ACTION, AND HE ASSERTED THAT
SOUTH VIETNAM SHOULD NEVERTHELESS DEFEND ITS INTEGRITY AGAINST ALL ENCROACHMENTS.

5. EDITORIAL COVERAGE HAS NOT FOLLOWED ANY SINGLE THEME. INDEPENDENT DAN LUAN JAN 15 LINKED THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE PARACELS (AS WELL AS THAT OVER THE SPRATLYS RNRTHER SOUTH) TO THE POSSIBILITY OF OIL DISCOVERIES. INDEPENDENT BUT THEP MENTIONED THE SAME POSSIBLITY, BUT CALLED IT "ONLY AN HYPOTHESIS." BUT THEP BELIEVED THE MATTER IS RELATED TO TALKS IN PARIS BETWEEN SECRETARY KISSINGER AND LE DUC THO. WITHOUT EXPLAINING HIS REASONING, THE EDITORIALIST DECLARED THAT THE TWO EVENTS ARE
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"DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE SAME MATTER."

6. AS COULD BE EXPECTED, THE GOVERNMENT-RUN RADIO AND TV COVERAGE HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY STRONG AGAINST THE CHINESE. FOR EXAMPLE, A JAN 14 RADIO COMMENTARY BLASTED THE CHINESE CLAIM AS "EXTREMELY OVERBEARING, IRRATIONAL, AND INCONSISTENT WITH REALITY."
MARTIN

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NNN

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